

An open letter to my students

Hello - and welcome to the History of Graphic Design. I'd prefer a different name, and without the capitalization. As graphic design has permeated the world, and the world is large, I prefer to call this graphic design histories. In part the lower-case naming also reflects my own ambivalence toward graphic design and history. No doubt it will be inadequate.

This combination is troubling to me for a few reasons. On one hand, I'm intensely interested in design, and graphic design in general. It reflects the inventiveness of humans to communicate through a complex (predominately) visual system of their own making. As visual animals, we look for (no pun intended) things that hold our attention and ask us to decipher them. We want to know what we see. We want to make meaning out of the world and the things in it should help us, especially if we make them. We are fascinated by the visual —beautiful, ugly, clear or mysterious. We want to engage our minds as well, as we look for the intriguing interplay of text and image and color and form and other formal constructions; all in an effort to make knowledge emerge.

We also desire to engage our bodies in a more visceral way —we want to feel something beautiful around us and find its form in touch and experiential moments. We connect the visual with these other senses; another place for graphic design to have its way with us.

We also desire to fit visual experiences into context. We want meaning to emerge not only from the artifact itself, but where that artifact floats in the world. This contextualization is as good as any reason to study graphic design histories. While I often hear that something looks / is “old-school”, the lack of contextualization of that material both makes me crazy and saddens me. We should know better.

On the other hand (remember the other hand, a few paragraphs back?) Histories are always written by those people, their ideas and their artifacts that survive and float to the authoritarian top. This means very much is forgotten, lost buried, burned, erased, and neglected. It also means that whoever writes and *archives*, tends to win, as writing the text of history usually gives it both authority and preservation.

It is often myopic, and this especially troubles me. Where are the graphic design histories of cultures that are less than dominant in a global sense, and may not even care to examine the path of visual materials as carefully as others? What about those disenfranchised groups that produce graphic design artifacts because they have to, but fail to re-contextualize them into a “history”? Thank the gods for those that care enough to frame and re-frame these histories so that we can examine them from some distance, and try to do something with them. Sad though in imagining all that richness of visual stuff that has passed away. Grateful too that some of it might have been such crap that it should disappear, or maybe our culture needs to shift its thinking away from preservation altogether, where stories of graphic design are told with voice and hand-gestures, so that we have to imagine them over and over again as they slowly change through this translation of telling. All that stuff reduced to memory and story —imagine. For what then all of these “histories”?

What about this then? What are we supposed to “do” with graphic design histories? Why should we even spend the time (all these glorious Tuesday - Thursday brunch-times wasted in a darkened room listening and looking at what?). Why should we care, when much of what we desire to see or tap into is available without the tedium of gathering together and talking among ourselves about it? This too is a bit of a conundrum, as we have to question why this conversation? Why this cohort? Why this time to retell and translate and explore and watch and misinform and look on with fascination on what has come before? A tough question and one I've struggled with since having first been told I'd be teaching this class. Hopefully we'll answer this question all-together-now, and come up with a reason for this.

I have my own reasons that I'll be sharing as we go along. I'll also ask you for yours. Please give them.

How and when we give them matters. This class meets every tuesday and thursday, from 2:00 to 3:15 in the afternoon.

During that time, you will be expected to be present in class. This does not only mean that you will bring your body to class, this also means that you will bring your attention and passion to class, as best you can.

I know this will vary each day, and during each class period, but I will expect you to do your best. I will expect this from each interaction I ask you to perform, from asking questions to giving presentations and engaging readings. If this material does not interest you, I will ask you to “perform” your interest as best you can.

This idea of attention —to attend to what’s at hand —is tempted by the many devices that are meant to save us from this difficult task. These devices are small, easily secreted in your hand, quiet and discrete, they offer a small portal out of slowness and boredom. During this class I’d ask that you refrain from using them, or if you need to, that you would step outside the classroom to use them.

This class is an based on a construct of ignorance, mine as well as yours. Its also based on a construct of knowledge; again mine as well as yours. This is the pleasure of the group-learn-in-place-all-together; it offers a collective opportunity to explore something with the vastness of experience from all of our lives coming together at one point. Potentially very powerful.

How to do this? Another question I have wrestled with in constructing this course. My answer comes from both my own selfishness in wanting to learn and my desire to satisfy what I see as a particular audience’s desire to learn.

What I’m putting forward then is a shifting structure, that might change as we go along. For those of you that know me as a teacher already, you’ll know this to be a challenge.

So here we go.

Required textbook (available at the UWSP bookstore)

Graphic Design History, by Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish

Structure of the course

This course covers 15 weeks, meeting each monday and wednesday from 12:30- 1:45, except for spring break and other designated dates.

At this time, we will meet the following dates.

- January 23/
January 28/ January 30
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- February 04 / February 06
February 11 / February 13
February 18 / February 20
February 25 / February 27
.....
- March 04/ March 06
March 11 / March 13
.....
- spring break - March 18 -March 22***
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- March 25 / March 27
.....
- April 01 / April 03
April 08 / April 10
April 15 / April 17
April 22 / April 24
.....
- April 29 / May 01
May 06 / May 08
.....
- exam Thursday, May 16th 8:00AM - 10:00AM

Daily structure

Each meeting time will follow this general structure. This will vary or evolve as learning needs dictate.

Note : you must be present for attendance, or you will be considered absent.

I will review my attendance policy with you. Please contact me by email to let me know.

- 12:30 to 1:30** lecture + discussion / panel discussion
- 1:30 to 1:45** questions raised + other announcements

schedule

ART 393 SPRING2016

- January 23 : introduction + discussion : *why / what (is) - graphic design? communications model*
January 28 : lecture / discussion : *from prehistory to early writing*
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- February 04 / February 06 : lecture / discussion : *classical literacy*
: lecture / discussion : *medieval letter forms + book formats*
- February 11 : lecture / discussion : *renaissance design : standardization and modularization in print*
- February 13 : lecture / discussion : *modern typography and the public sphere*
- February 18/ February 20 : lecture / discussion : *the graphic effects of industrial production*
: lecture / discussion : *mass mediation*
- February 25 / February 27 : small group meetings and planning for presentations
.....
- March 04 / March 06 : small group meetings and planning for presentations
- March 11 / March 13 : lecture / discussion : *formation of the modern movement*
: lecture / discussion : *innovation and persuasion*
- week of March 18th** *spring break*
- March 25 / March 27 : lecture / discussion : *the culture of consumption*
: lecture / discussion : *protest and alternative life*
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- April 01 / April 03 : lecture / discussion : *public information campaigns and information design*
: mid-term exam : *in-class exam + presentation outlines w/ images due*
- April 08 / April 10 : lecture / discussion : *corporate identities and international style*
: lecture / discussion : *post-modernism in design + concepts for Museum of Graphic Design panel concepts due*
- April 15 / April 17 : lecture / discussion : *graphic design activism : The AIDS crisis + ACTUP / Occupy Wallstreet, #MeToo etc.*
- April 22 / April 24 : lecture / discussion : *digital design*
: lecture / discussion : *graphic design and globalization*
- April 24 / May 01 : presentations
: presentations
.....
- May 06 / May 08 : presentations
: install the *Museum of Graphic Design History*
.....
- May 16 : exam 8:00AM - 10:00AM

attendance at lectures and discussions + assigned lectures + in-class participation (overall grade added to other grading)

Finally, you must participate in-class as much as a course this size allows. Be curious and for the gods' sake show some passion, or at least work hard to fake it.

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connecting contemporary graphic design with the history of graphic design (presentation) : (1/3 grade)

Starting February 25, you will select two partners (3 people together) and meet with them to discuss options for topics and an approach to creating a presentation that will last 15 minutes. The presentation will last 15 minutes, with time for 3 questions that will account for the remaining 5 minutes.

Obviously content is important here. Your task is to look for current events (within the last 3 years) that are somehow impacted / shaped / related to the graphic design. Please make those connections clear in your presentation, and also make sure that your audience understands why you think this is important to consider.

A clear path of critical thinking should be evident in your presentation.

You will produce a specific outline for the presentation, and include proper citations and acknowledgements.

museum of graphic design history (1/3 grade)

This final project will be individually completed. As a class we will define our own relevant history of graphic design. Your charge will be to develop a panel exhibit component that examines an individual who has made a significant contribution to some part of graphic design history. We will produce this as a physical exhibition and a digital exhibition to be displayed in a location on-campus tbd.

On March 27, you will be sent an illustrator file that will contain a standard design grid, a header and type and image specs. that will allow you to prepare an exhibition panel that you will be preparing for digital output through print and design. On those dates you will have prepared a complete proof for review and discussion by all members of class, so that we can determine any changes and corrections to what will become the final exhibition panels.

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final exam (1/3 grade) The content of the exam will be determined prior to the exam.

graphic designers

ART 393 SPRING2019

Adrian Frutiger
Alan Aldridge
Alan Fletcher
Aldus Manutius
Alexey Brodovitch
Angus Hyland
April Greiman
Armin Hofmann
Baron Barrymore Halpenny
Brandon Rike
Breuk Iversen
Brian Webb
Bruce Mau
Bruno Munari
Bugra Gulsoy
Carol Twombly
Catrin GroÙe
Charles and Ray Eames
Chip Kidd
Christopher Simmons
Dave Halili
David Carson
Debbie Millman
Denise Gonzales Crisp
Dick Bruna
Elaine Lustig Cohen
Ellen Lupton
Emil Ruder
Eric Carle
Eric Gill
Erik Nitsche
Erik Spiekermann
Fons Hickmann
Friedrich Kurt Fiedler
Gail Anderson (graphic designer)
Ghobad Shiva
Giambattista Bodoni
Hans Hulsbosch
Harry Beck
Heinz Edelmann
Herb Lubalin
Herbert Bayer
Hugh Syme

Irma Boom
István Orosz
Ivana Tomljenović-Meller
Jacqueline Casey
Jake Tilson
James Victore
Jan Balet
Jan Sawka
Jan Tschichold
Jeff Arwadi
Jessica Helfand
Jessica Hische
Jessica Walsh
Jock Kinneir
John Alvin
John Bielenberg
John Lloyd
John Maeda
Jon Burgerman
Jon Hicks
Jonathan Barnbrook
Josef Müller-Brockmann
Julian House
Jurek Wajdowicz
Kadington
Kate Moross
Katherine McCoy
László Moholy-Nagy
Leif Podhajsky
Louise Fili
Louise Sandhaus
Lynda Weinman
Margaret Calvert
Marian Bantjes
Martin Majoor
Massimo Vignelli
Max Huber
Mehdi Saeedi
Milton Glaser
Mirko Ilić
Morteza Momayez
Muriel Cooper
Neville Brody

Noma Bar
Oscar Mariné
Otl Aicher
Paul Rand
Paula Scher
Peter Buchanan-Smith
Peter Saville
Philip B. Meggs
Pilar Zeta
Poul Lange
Reza Abedini
Robert Brownjohn
Robert L. Peters
Roberto Baldazzini
Rudy VanderLans
Saul Bass
Shekhar Gurera
Sheila Levrant de Bretteville
Shigeo Fukuda
Soundarya Rajinikanth
Stanisław Czerski
Stanley Donwood
Stefan Sagmeister
Steven Heller
Storm Thorgerson
Susan Kare
Tariq Jakobsen
Tibor Kalman
Tina Roth-Eisenberg
Tom Eckersley
Tom Geismar
Urso Chappell
Vaughan Oliver
Vincent Connare
Vittorio Fiorucci
Wally Olins
Walter Landor
William Caslon
William Morris
Wim Crouwel
Wolfgang Weingart
Zuzana Licko

contemporary topics

ART 393 SPRING2019

climate change
cell phone use
robotics
AI
gaming
food security
identity politics
me too movement
pro-life movement
inequality (income)
racism
poverty
illiteracy
unemployment
personal safety
(clean) water security
war
environment
health care
power of the federal government
crime and violence
energy security
drug use
homelessness
the economy
ISIS
white supremacy
illegal immigration
cancer
STDs
vaping
emerging technologies
factory farming
international diplomacy
voting reform
human enhancement
through cybernetics
space travel
pro-choice movement
gay marriage
rape
woman in combat
euthanasia

religious freedom
LGBT identities
terrorism
two-party political system
nationalism
patriotism
pornography
conservation
self-driving cars
toxic masculinity
the border wall
the US space program
extinction
nutrition
identity politics
virtual reality